

A special meeting of the Board of Aldermen was held Tuesday, February 16, 2016, at 7:00 p.m. in the Aldermanic Chamber.

President Brian S. McCarthy presided; City Clerk Patricia D. Piecuch recorded.

Prayer was offered by City Clerk Patricia D. Piecuch; Alderman-at-Large Daniel T. Moriarty led in the Pledge to the Flag.

The roll call was taken with 15 members of the Board of Aldermen present.

Mayor James W. Donchess was also present.

MAYOR'S ANNUAL STATE-OF-THE-CITY ADDRESS

Good evening President McCarthy, Vice President Wilshire, members of the Board of Aldermen, Board of Education members, BPW Commissioners, other elected officials, city division directors, city staff, community members, and guests. I'd like to thank you all for being here this evening. I'd also like to thank my wife, Vicki, for being here.

I have now been in office for a little over a month. Many people have asked me what it is like to be Mayor again. While many things are similar and some of the challenges are different, one thing is the same - the quality and dedication of the people who work for the city – our city employees – is still very high. I am proud to be leading them in serving the citizens of Nashua.

Since my term began, I've held a town hall in every Ward of the city. I've spoken with residents, and listened to your ideas and your concerns and many members of the Board of Aldermen have joined me. I have been inspired by the hundreds of people who have attended, showing their support and concern for the city's future. At our town halls we have discussed many issues and problems raised by Nashuans – roads and streets paving, sidewalk plowing, the importance of our schools, greater river access, traffic lights and timing, lighting on the rail trail, our riverwalks, downtown housing, and many more issues. We've learned that Nashuans are certainly not passive. They want to play an active role in the well-being and vitality of our community. This commitment is an undeniable asset for our city.

As Mayor my goal is to make Nashua a city that works for all of our people, for our senior citizens and our younger generations, for high tech engineers, and for teachers, firefighters, police and custodians, for lifelong Nashuans and for new residents. This was one of my goals in holding the town halls – to hear from all citizens in their own neighborhoods about their hopes for Nashua over the next four years and beyond – in order to make our city one that works for everyone. I welcome the opportunity to work with the Board of Aldermen over the next four year's. The Board is my partner in city government. I have enabled Board members to work directly with city employees to make city government work more effectively on behalf of the citizens of Nashua. My door is always open to any Aldermen who want to work on any city issue or problem.

In addition to the passion of our people and the capability of our Board of Aldermen and city employees, Nashua is blessed to have a strong Veteran's community. Bob Coutemanche is one of those Veterans who might be here tonight. Bob and his wife Barbara work tirelessly for Veterans in Nashua and throughout New Hampshire. The financial health of the city is strong. Fitch recently affirmed their Triple A bond rating and Standard and Poor's reaffirmed their AA+ rating, one notch below Triple A. I want to thank City CFO John Griffin and City Treasurer David Fredette, who is here for all of their work on the city's finances and with the rating agencies.

As Mayor one of my main responsibilities is to focus on city operations – making sure the snow is plowed and the garbage picked up, taking care of our parks and public spaces, making sure that our money is spent carefully, trying to improve traffic flow, etc., but as Mayor I also work broader concerns like the long term economic health of our city.

In order to make our economic development efforts more effective, I am focusing on five economic development priorities – first jobs, particularly technology jobs; second, working to bring commuter rail to Nashua; third, making sure that Nashua has well qualified people to fill jobs in all sectors of the economy; fourth, strengthening public education; and finally, energizing our downtown.

Technology, innovation, and entrepreneurship are in Nashua's DNA. In the nineteenth century our historic Mills and our Millyard was a major technological center of America's industrial revolution. The mills and all of the Millyard facilities were ingeniously organized as one gigantic machine. Back then, the mill workers like my wife's grandparents whose names were Costie and Victoria – thousands of them were immigrants - produced textiles for the whole country and the world. We still have a deep bench of technology expertise in Nashua. We have BAE Systems, an advanced leader in defense, aerospace, and cyber security which employs 4,500 people. We have numerous tech successes that have been founded by former employees of Digital Equipment Corporation, the computer systems giant that in the 80s and 90s employed 6,000 people in Nashua and southern New Hampshire. I want to grow even more tech jobs in Nashua – in our south end, on Simon Street and in our Millyard.

We are fortunate to have businesses that are established members of Nashua's culture of innovation. Our south end is home to Oracle, Dell, Benchmark, Data Gravity, Plexxis, XCube, Simquest and many other tech businesses. These companies employ thousands of people and their presence in our community continues to grow. The Flatley Company runs the annual Flatley Challenge in the south end which brings numerous tech companies into that area. Flatley bought the huge 750,000 square foot former Digital facility which was empty as recently as 2007. Now over 1,500 people work in that former DEC space. The Flatley Company has plans to double the size of their tech footprint with as much as 750,000 square feet of new tech R & D space at their Gateway Hills development in the south end. In our downtown we have Make-It Labs, New Hampshire's first makerspace, which provides budding entrepreneurs with the tools they need to generate ideas and prototypes for products. We need to build upon this progress in the years ahead. I also will be working on a summer jobs program. A summer job teaches a young person the fundamentals of holding a job and is a good foundation for a successful life of work. Nashua should have a summer jobs program that includes public and private sector jobs.

A second economic development priority is commuter rail service for Nashua. Rail will add jobs, connect our people with the growing biological sciences industry and the industrial internet companies to our south, and help us to retain and attract the young people that we need for Nashua's success. General Electric, which has recently announced that it's moving its headquarters to Boston, understands the importance of connecting with Boston's growing economy and we should learn from their example. The initial groundwork for rail service has been laid but ultimate success has as much to do with all of us as it has to do with the Mayor's office or city government. The \$4 million that is necessary for the next steps in the rail project are included in the Governor's 10-year transportation plan. The Governor has proposed taking these steps in a way that costs the State of New Hampshire not one dime. The funds consist of federal money that cannot currently be repurposed for any other use and a state match of \$800,000 of toll credits. These credits satisfy state matching requirements and they have been awarded by the federal government – they are not state dollars. The State has a \$250 million surplus in toll credits, more than it can use, according to the DOT, in the foreseeable future.

I went to the House Public Works Committee to testify in favor of keeping the rail money in the Governor's 10-year plan, and I can tell you that there is a lot more work to be done. I was grateful to other Nashuans who came to express their support. Tracy Hatch from the Chamber testified effectively again, Sister Buley of Rivier University attended, and several Nashua residents, like Paul Patti from Ward 8, came in support. Some members of the house committee expressed opposition to taking this next rail step even though it requires no expenditure for any state money. This of course is hard to understand.

In the coming months, I will bring together a coalition of businesses in the Nashua region who will work together to advocate for commuter rail. This effort will be in partnership with the Greater Nashua Chamber of Commerce, an organization that for years has been advocating effectively for rail service for our city.

Simultaneously, we will work with city and area residents to build a robust grassroots coalition to support rail. Together, we will contact our legislators in Concord and fight for rail as an integral part of Nashua's and New Hampshire's futures.

A third element of the economic development strategy will be workforce development. Workforce development means working across our community to help ensure that we have qualified people available to fill the jobs we have now and the jobs of the future. Nashua's economy has strengthened since the Great Recession of 2008. Our unemployment rate in New Hampshire is a little over 3% and economists would call this a full employment economy. However, the number of jobs in New Hampshire is about the same as it was before the 2008 recession. Our business leaders, like Tracy Hatch tell us that there are many jobs that are going unfilled at the present time, especially high-paying professional and high-skilled jobs. What do these facts tell us? If we want to build a strong economy, we must work to ensure that we educate and develop the qualified employees that our businesses need to thrive and grow which I am calling the workforce development. We need to work with our businesses, our schools, our community college, and our universities to make sure that available jobs get filled and that Nashua people can find great jobs and opportunities for careers right here in Nashua.

Fourth, our schools are vital to the long term health of our city and must be part of our economic development strategy. We need the strongest public schools we can have, not only so that each of our kids can optimize his or her potential, but also so that businesses that are making decisions regarding growing here or locating here can feel confidence that they can find qualified, capable, skilled employees. There are many steps that our Board of Education should consider to improve education in Nashua – for example, broader pre-kindergarten education or, a more intensive focus on young children which would ensure that each child reads at grade level at the end of third grade. However, we are constrained by the funds that we have available, so accomplishing these goals certainly will not be easy or immediate.

At our high schools the high level of accomplishment is remarkable. Far more Nashua students than anywhere else in New Hampshire take and pass advanced placement, the so-called AP courses in many different disciplines. Our CTE programs – from computer networking and bio-robotics to auto mechanics and electrical contracting are outstanding. The honors won by our high school students are so numerous and impressive that I cannot recognize them all here. One example – The Nashua High School South Economics Team won the 2015 Harvard University Pre-Collegiate Economics Challenge, the first public school to ever win in the history of the challenge. Another example – in 2015, the South Forensics Team placed in the top 12 teams out of 800 at the NYU Cybersecurity Competition. And I could go on and on.

However, at our schools we definitely have educational challenges that must be met. We have rising numbers of children who qualify for free or reduced lunch which a measure of low income, it is now about 43%. We have rising numbers of kids whose primary language is not English and we have a rising number of children with disabilities. Some of the kids who come to school are from families suffering a high degree of stress and they are not ready for a learning environment. Our teachers at our elementary schools do a great job in nurturing and educating kids who come to kindergarten and/or first grade totally unprepared in reading and math.

Unfortunately, substance use is a major challenge that has an impact on our schools. More kids than people realize, have parents or other family members who are heroin abusers, and the problems that kids encounter at home or on the street spill over into the school environment. When secondary principals are asked what they need the most, their answer is actually drug counselors and social workers. In addition to our public schools, Rivier University and the other institutions of higher learning that we have in Nashua are vital to the state of our city and I want to strengthen the city's relationships with them. Rivier has transformed its campus and the gateway to our downtown on lower Main Street. Under the leadership of Sister Paula Marie Buley, Rivier has taken the bold step of guaranteeing student loans for graduates who may not get jobs after matriculation. Rivier is doing a great job in attracting hundreds of international students into its graduate programs in computer science. Rivier is a strong proponent of rail service for Nashua because rail will make Rivier more attractive to the students they want to bring to Nashua. Rivier and our other colleges and universities can play a vital role in our workforce development initiatives, in our pro-rail coalition, and in our

downtown. I know that by working closely together with these institutions that we can accomplish a lot by working together.

In Nashua education has always been an effort on the part of all community members and I'm proud to support all of the people who make our school system and our higher education system successful. I hope that we continue to recognize the outstanding achievements of our educational professionals and volunteers. We have an extraordinary educational community in this city, and we should never take them for granted.

Finally, another critical component of our economic development efforts is our downtown. Fortunately we have many inspiring people who are devoted to Nashua's downtown. Paul Shea of Great American Downtown, James Vayo, another imaginative young member of our community, Marylou Blaisdell of DesignWorks, the Ruddock family of Riverwalk, Jessisa DePontbriand of JaJabelle's, Billy and Chris Fokas of Martha's, and many more people. These downtown leaders are shaping a culture that will bring newcomers downtown to live and engage. If we want to attract young people and empty-nesters to move into downtown, we must offer a mix of market rate and affordable housing opportunities. Fortunately, many of these developments are already occurring. The Apartments at Cotton Mill Square opened in 2014. The Brady-Sullivan conversion of the Franklin Street mill and the Renaissance Downtowns project on Bridge Street will bring a wide variety of people into downtown to live. I am committed to working with developers to bring additional residential opportunities into the heart of our city. Our downtown will also be strengthened through a dynamic culture of the visual and performing arts. Organizations such as City Arts Nashua, Symphony NH, Peacock Players, Great American Downtown, the Riverwalk Cafe, Friends of the Library and many others have played a role in expanding the presence of arts and culture in downtown Nashua. We must also support our performing arts organizations by improving the performance space options in our city. The Nashua Arts Commission hired consultant Duncan Webb to do a feasibility study for a new performing arts center in downtown Nashua. The results of this study will provide a roadmap for the best process for sizing, funding, and establishing a city performing arts center. We are looking forward to the results of the study. The addition of a performing arts center and more housing together will revitalize downtown and lead to future economic development opportunities.

We cannot talk about the state of our city without mentioning our fire and police departments. Our fire department is saving lives every day. Firefighters administered 169 doses of Narcan in the last two-thirds of last year and they are continuing with this life-saving work this year. Our fire department responds so quickly and effectively to fire calls that most fires never get going. Chief Andrew Lavoie at the police department is doing a great job in making sure that the department is building a relationship of trust and understanding with our minority communities. The police department is also on the front lines of the fight against the heroin trade in Nashua. Our narcotics unit and the POP unit track down and arrest heroin dealers and all officers work to stop drug-related crime. I truly believe we have the best fire and police departments in the State of New Hampshire, something of which I am very proud.

In the coming years we must focus on our public parks and rivers. Mine Falls Park and Greeley Park need to be pristine and our smaller parks the same. The city now has Dr. Madeline Mineau as a river specialist. I have asked her to focus on making new uses of our river waterfront and even the canal which has been unused for too long.

In talking about the state of our city we need to talk about some of our challenges, the most striking of which is our public health crisis surrounding the use of heroin and opioid addiction. Families across Nashua have been impacted by this terrible epidemic. Our EMS and Fire Rescue teams are responding to overdose calls on a daily basis. There were thirty-nine ODs including two deaths in Nashua in January. Our treatment centers are full to their capacity and their waiting lists are growing. There is high demand for a strong recovery community here in Nashua, where those who have struggled with substance abuse can unite in hope. There is also a demand for stronger prevention efforts to educate parents and kids regarding the dangers and signs of substance abuse. Last month, I established a task force of individuals and organizations whose experience and expertise can help streamline city efforts to deal with the crisis of heroin. We can increase the effectiveness of our efforts by working together and communicating regularly. The Mayor's Opioid Task Force

will meet monthly to discuss specific plans regarding substance abuse prevention, treatment, recovery, and law enforcement intervention.

Another challenge is state and federal downshifting of costs and responsibilities onto the city and its taxpayers. The magnitude of this downshifting is beyond what many people realize. Let's take a single example – the state run and state mandated pension system for city employees. Over the past several years the State of New Hampshire downshifted between \$10 and \$13 million in additional pension costs onto the City of Nashua, that's per year. These were costs the state had previously borne in recognition that the system is state mandated, state controlled and state managed. For the same \$10 to \$13 million in pension costs that the state has downshifted onto city taxpayers, the city could have early childhood education for all children, we could have a program to ensure that third graders can read at grade level, we could have another POP unit in the police department to help us fight drug related crime, we could have a lot more street paving and we would still have significantly lower taxes.

We will be watching any future efforts of the state to raise taxes on city taxpayers, and will be sounding the alarm when this occurs. State officials should no longer be allowed to avoid their responsibilities by quietly raising property taxes. An issue which will be discussed in 2016 is the potential outside contracting of our custodial services. During 2015, the Board of Education requested proposals for the privatization of the custodial services for school buildings. Privatization would put 101 employees out of work. This is a step that I do not believe is in the long-term best interests of the City of Nashua. Over the past months I have come to know many of our custodians and understand better the role that they play in our schools. Custodians are members of each school community. Not only to they maintain our school buildings, the city's most valuable physical asset, but they also contribute in many other ways like helping with children and staying late to make after school activities possible and also in many other ways.

I also want to draw your attention to the importance of infrastructure in our city. At our town halls citizens have raised the condition of our streets and their transportation needs over and over again. We need to help our people get from place to place with ease and without obstacle. Over the course of 2016, the Board of Aldermen, the city and I will be making progress on some significant infrastructure projects. In 2016, I believe we will be taking a needed leap forward in street paving. The city has fallen way behind in street paving over a number of years and residents all over the city have been raising this problem for a long time. We must catch up. We will soon be bringing on line a software system that will enable us to simultaneously evaluate the condition of all the city's 1,300 streets. We will then bond for the paving of most of the city's arterial streets and a lot of the neighborhood streets during the 2016 and 2017 construction seasons.

Another big project is the improvement of the property the city bought last year at the end of Burke Street. This is a four acre parcel of land with a massive garage and an attached 50,000 square foot office space. This purchase accomplished some important objectives. First, the land we bought is adjacent to the city's sewage treatment plant which has used up all the land around it so that we will now have the land to make any necessary expansion. Second, the city needs a new public works garage. Our current garage is more than 40 years old and is not large enough for our needs. The DPW has to keep dump trucks and other vehicles outside which shortens their life. The Burke Street project will give us the space we need to house all of the DPW and Parks Department vehicles indoors with room to spare. Third, the dilapidated parks buildings in Greeley Park need to be replaced and they have for a long time. Instead of spending money to do that we will move these park functions to the new facility on Burke Street.

Finally, the 50,000 square foot office building is large enough to house all public works and engineering employees. It is also large enough for our school administration. Moving the school administration to Burke Street will enable us to use the current school administration building for a program for children with severe disabilities which will save the city \$68,000 per year in rent. It cost the city \$4 million to buy the Burke Street property and the estimate is that it will take another \$10 to \$15 million dollar investment to improve the facility for city use. It would cost the city more than \$60 million dollars to construct a new facility like the one on Burke Street so by moving forward on this project we can save tens of millions of dollars. We will be hosting a tour of the Burke Street facility for the public on a Saturday morning in March and the Board of Aldermen will be part

of that as well so that everyone can see the property that the city has purchased. We will announce the details of the tour soon.

During 2016, we will also be improving the intersections in front of the Turnpike Plaza/Whole Foods and Charron Avenue in order to improve traffic flow and waiting time for many residents. This project will be paid for by contributions from private property owners and by city funds. During 2016, we will be making the decision as to how to proceed with the acquisition of the Mine Falls hydroelectric dam lease which will be a significant financial benefit to the city.

At the beginning of my talk I said that I want Nashua to be a city that works for all of our people. When I look at the composition of our boards and commissions, I see that there is one group that is not well represented – our young people, the millennial generation. All agree on the long-term importance of young people in Nashua and in New Hampshire, but I want to ensure that we include our young people in city government. Therefore, I have recently appointed Lydia Foley as the newest member of the Business and Industrial Development Authority, the Chair of which is Jack Tulley and I am appointing Simon Sarris to the Downtown Advisory Board and Alison Bankowski to our Arts Commission. We need the energy, enthusiasm, point of view and creativity of our young people for our city to thrive and we need to continue to include young people in our boards and commissions.

Before I conclude, I want to stress that I have an open door for city residents and city employees who have ideas about how we can improve Nashua or Nashua city government. You are invited to come in and talk about city issues. As we look forward, we must all work together for Nashua's success. I am asking all to get involved – on our boards and commissions, in a pro-rail coalition, as volunteers for our social service and arts organizations, in our schools and for youth athletic leagues, in giving input regarding city projects at public meetings and town halls, and in many other ways. I know that if we all work together over the next four years we can make Nashua an even better place to live, work, grow a business, and to raise a family.

Thank you all for your support and for your love of our community.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION BY ALDERMAN WILSHIRE THAT THE FEBRUARY 16, 2016, MEETING OF THE BOARD OF ALDERMEN BE ADJOURNED
MOTION CARRIED

The meeting was declared adjourned at 7:35 p.m.

Attest: Patricia D. Piecuch, City Clerk